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ABSTRACT

In searching for ways to provide continuing education in the humanities, community colleges can look to the various state programs sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities which, since 1970, have taken humanities education out of the traditional library/classroom environment and into non-traditional settings, such as school auditoriums, shopping malls, union locals, and other gathering places for the out-of-school adult population. These programs, coordinated by state committees, have included a poetry forum in Albermarle County, Virginia; a public discussion of the history and importance of the presidential primaries in New Hampshire; a conference on "Literature and the Urban Experience" in Newark, New Jersey; and an interdisciplinary conference on the American West involving experts in the areas of architecture, urban planning, literature, and history. Administration of these programs requires identifying areas of interest to the general public, soliciting support from private and civic organizations, arranging for publicity, and coordinating program logistics. Though these activities may at first be seen as outside the accepted realm of teaching and research, it must be remembered that increased public exposure to the humanities may stimulate public support for humanities education in the academic setting. (JP)

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# THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE HUMANITIES IN PROMOTING LIFELONG EDUCATION

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Presented at Berkshire Community College

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I want to talk with you today about using the humanities in nontraditional situations. To place the humanities in a non-traditional context goes against the grain of most of us since we have been taught to find them in libraries, classrooms, and archives. This is only one of many paradoxes implicit in the use of the humanities. Permit me to pursue a circular route to illustrate what I mean. To begin with, the humanities are involved with people, everyday people -- their concerns, their values, their relationships to each other; their relationships to the concentric circles of their lives. On the other hand, every thought, every act, every evaluation of our being involves history, and history must often be written. We owe it to those yet unborn to record our perceptions and experiences, and the perceptions and experiences of those who went before us, so that succeeding generations can understand fully the context in which they find themselves.

And once we begin to collect words we have to find places to put them and places in which to use them; quite logically we create libraries and classrooms. Since we don't want to collect everything, we try to preserve only that which is excellent. Excellent words are those that are put together by people with a gift for expression. Thus we become selective and exclusionary in creating our intellectual treasury. But it is an expanding treasury, because if I were to use the excellent words of my colleague or of someone else who wrote a century before me, and used those words exclusively, I should make no contribution to the humanities -- the contribution would have been made. Therefore, implicit in recording that body of knowledge that helps each

generation understand the context in which it lives, is a need for creative addition, for reorganization, and, yes, for innovation and nontraditional expression.

When Emerson said "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines,"[1] he caused quite a ripple, and he defined precisely the topic of this session. But that expression has been so overexposed that it almost ceases to have meaning. In order to tell you in new terms what Emerson was saying, I am going to concentrate on what we in the NEH-supported state humanities programs have been doing for almost a decade.

In 1970, when Congress reauthorized the NEH for the first time, the legislators instructed that agency to give the humanities greater importance in ordinary people's lives. It was then that the state humanities programs, which now operate in 50 states and two territories, were initiated. As is the case with most foundations, a board of directors -- in New Jersey it is called a committee -- decides how available monies shall be allocated. Our board consists of twenty-three citizens of New Jersey, representing broadly the general public, the professions, different age levels, the sexes, and the state's geographical regions. In New Jersey two of the members are appointed by the governor and their terms are concurrent with his. The rest serve three-year terms and may be reelected once.

Federal legislation and guidelines provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, have established the parameters within

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self Reliance" (1839-40)

which the committee can operate. Specifically, funds are awarded through the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities to groups, not to individuals. They must be spent on public humanities programs that will interest, educate, and provoke discussion among the out-of-school adult population. Humanists and the humanities are central -- and usually more than one discipline is involved. The range of topics that can be considered is as broad as the imagination, except that the topic must coincide with the concerns of everyday people. These concerns may be the same ones that have caused human beings to ponder for centuries. They may be concerns that are as modern as tomorrow. I said that the programs must educate, but the programs are not designed for classroom situations in which students register for credit or certification, or to gain professional or technical proficiency. Two-year colleges, with their emphasis on community education are, however, ideal locations for public humanities programs.

Local libraries, historical societies, labor union headquarters, women's clubs, school auditoriums, and shopping malls are among the other places in which humanities programming for the public has been scheduled. The New Jersey Committee for the Humanities is especially concerned that a sponsor keep in mind the broadest possible public in scheduling any program it funds, and admission fees are discouraged. Live programs are the main staple, but radio, television, and film are used effectively. When a portion of the target audience is not comfortable in the English language, speakers are urged to build in a translation element that will make the program understandable and accessible to that group.

Utilizing the program concept developed by the Office of State Programs in the National Endowment for the Humanities, many nonprofit groups have developed and sponsored innovative public programs which may give you some sense of the many different ways which community and two-year colleges can develop continuing education in the humanities. In Virginia for instance, poetry was put on trial in the Albermarle County Courthouse before a crowd of 120 people. A panel of poets who were critics and professors in addition to being creators of poetry, defined the role of poetry in our society. Michael Ryan commented that "The poet's position in relation to society has gradually moved from the center to the periphery." But Stanley Kunetz, a Pulitzer prize-winning poet, argued "I think of the poet as the representative free man of our time." Robert Haas stated "Poetry is work with language in the pools of forms from which common life emerges, is envisioned, and revised. It tests the resilience of conventions that have been passed down and makes up new ones. It is ... a plow that turns up the dark soil of social life ... Foolish to claim too much for the activity, but deadly, literally, to imagine a culture without it."

The program in Virginia dealt with a form that has been with us since the beginning of civilization. Poetic imagery has been central in all tales that reveal most about prehistory. Public humanities programs are also very much concerned with contemporary issues. For instance, a program in New Hampshire dealt with a recent historic development, the presidential primary. And where else would it be more appropriate to discuss the history and importance of the presidential primary than in New Hampshire, the place

where presidential hopefuls first exposed themselves to public scrutiny? The discussion took place just three weeks before the Presidential election and reflected on the history and significant value of this institution, utilizing the talents of historians and politicians, including two senators.

Some programs funded by state committees are supported both with private funding and with public funding. The New Jersey Committee for the Humanities last spring supported, along with corporations, private foundations and the National Endowment for the Humanities, a conference entitled "Literature and the Urban Experience," which took place in Newark, New Jersey. Present for three days in an urban setting was a star-studded cast of authors, poets, playwrights, and critics. Among the thirty-six writers who participated in the conference were James Baldwin, Bruno Bettelheim, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Penn Warren, Albert Innaurato, Marge Piercy, Piri Thomas, Toni Morrison, Leslie Fiedler, Jonathan Kozol, Edward Albee, and Stephen Spender. There were speeches, poetry readings, exhibits, lively discussions that took place in the meeting rooms, in the corridors, and during the lunch and dinner breaks. Bruno Bettelheim said, "Always it is the people who determine what city life means to us. The people are the city. It is the people who determine whether the child perceives the city as valuable and welcoming or frightening and murderous." The counterpoint of wonder and horror ran throughout the conference. Joyce Carol Oates asked the question "If the city is the text, how shall we read her? The city is an archetype of the imagination with opposed images of the sacred and the secular.

The fusion of polar opposites must be read as utopian, and consequently with disappointment."

Another conference supported by public and private funding as well, was one co-sponsored by the Idaho Humanities Forum, the Institute for the American West, and Levi Strauss which was entitled "That Awesome Space." The title refers to the area between the Rocky Mountain range and the coastal ranges, a landscape that seems to stretch out forever. Utilizing humanists from architectural history, urban planning, literature, history, and art history, the meaning of that space was analyzed in a conference that took place in Ketchum, Idaho, on June 18-21, 1980. In order to attract a significant group of ordinary citizens, scholarships were provided for at least one hundred of the 300 people who attended the conference. The scholarships were made possible by the contribution of Levi Strauss to the program.

The distance between placesin New Jersey is not as great as it is in the West, and it was relatively easy to draw a large crowd for a conference entitled "Barrier Islands" that took place on the State's coastline early in the fall of 1980. At issue were the history, the use and abuse of the attractive coastal islands which not only provide recreation areas for the citizens of New Jersey and surrounding areas, but protect the coastline from the assault of the cruel Atlantic ocean. Environmentalists, historians, and planners posed questions about the competing interests which urge development/preservation of the islands. How can they remain beautiful, fulfill their natural function, and yet provide an outlet for the dense population of the tiny state they border?

It is going to be difficult for me to tell you how to develop a program like those I have just described. First, of course, you must have a good idea. Paul Fussell, the National Book Award-winning author of The Great War and Modern Memory, said in a speech to scholars in the humanities "First comes the rape and then the seduction." [2] Good ideas come out of nowhere and somehow they have to be rationalized and fleshed out so that every step in the process is clear to those who are involved. I would not be honest if I told you that every idea that became a public program in the humanities appealed to all members of the proposer's academy. Many humanists are much more comfortable in a conventional setting then they are in a resort hotel, in an auditorium, in a home, or on the street. Sometimes it is very helpful -- even necessary for the conceiver to seek support outside the academic institution -- to work with a nonprofit cultural organization and perhaps to secure funding from one or more sources. In the case of "That Awesome Space," the Institute for the American West was that cultural source and Levi Strauss provided the funding for scholarships to underwrite the expenses of over one hundred people who might not have been able to afford four days in a hotel.

Of course someone had to convince Levi Strauss that the conference was a good idea. Our own program on "Literature and the Urban Experience," was sold to foundation representatives who recognized the usefulness of such an event and who became excited personally over the prospect of a cultural gathering in Newark. NJCH grants will fund many budget items, including publicity. Foundation and corporation money made possible a wider range of events and the overall excellent promotion that such a grandscale program needed.

2-Annual meeting, New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, 1976.

It is no secret that the initial funding from the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities stimulated the giving.

Time is a very important factor in implementing a good idea. The "Literature and the Urban Experience," program was at least two years in the planning and preparation. Much attention was given to placement of the program in the context of a reasonable estimate of how many people would come. Much thought was given to where those people might stay, how they would arrive in Newark, how they might best be conveyed to the central location, what they might need during the days while they were in attendance. And since it was the ordinary public that was being attracted to the conference, a great deal of research went into the selection of the proper advertising vehciles. The conference was scarcely advertised in literary journals but it was widely advertised in local newspapers, shopping guides, and on commercial radio. A Wordsworth scholar and Milton specialist spent months on very non-scholarly details.

But at the heart of all of the planning was an idea so exciting that people couldn't stay away. There were visitors from Europe, all over the United States, and people from all corners of New Jersey who said that they had never thought of coming to Newark for anything. One school teacher from Sussex County said her husband forbade her to go to Newark when she mentioned the conference, but she came anyway because the idea was so compelling.

Now let's look at the core of that activity. There were very traditional lectures by authors and critics that might be delivered

at a professional convention or that might be presented in a classroom but the context was innovative and nontraditional, and let me say to you that the guest speakers enjoyed the occasion more than anyone in the audience. Leslie Fielder remarked, "This is a party."

A spinoff from this exciting event has been marvelous for the project directors, it has been exciting for the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, and for the Endowment itself which dedicated most of its latest issue of Humanities to the conference. But think a minute about the impact this has had on the English department at the Newark campus of Rutgers University. This is a reward not to be overlooked in deciding to develop a program for a nontraditional audience.

The word reward brings us to a subject that is very difficult for us to discuss. How can the traditional academic expect to receive the usual rewards for participation in nontraditional humanistic activities?

The newer educational institutions created by the Morrill Act of 1862 became nominally service oriented. Even the elite institutions began in the late nineteenth century to consider the merger of liberal culture and utility. In 1888 Charles Eliot, celebrated Harvard president, emphasized a strong public role for humanists. Woodrow Wilson, president early in this century of Princeton, echoed Eliot's sentiments and then heeded his own advice.

Eliot claimed that liberal education needed "revival and reorganization, not in the interest of a few, a select and eminent

class, but in the interest of many, of the whole community." Steve Weiland, executive director of the Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities, and author of a paper on public pedagogy called "Pearls and Rubies to Their Discourse: Academic Rewards for American Scholars," says: "Despite enthusiasm of this kind in the citadel of elite education most institutions struggled throughout the last part of the nineteenth century with the development of a coherent mission which incorporated research, liberal education and utility."[3] However, most respected by faculty were the first two and those who gave their best efforts to teaching and research seemed best rewarded.

Although the need for public service is widely discussed, and the growth of the community college system certainly underscores that need, service remains difficult to categorize: is it participation in professional organizations, membership on university and departmental committees or election to the local school board? And what of nontraditional education for the general public? Recognition for such service is necessary to the academic and certainly important in preserving our humanities-based cultural heritage -- but I cannot tell you that it should be evaluated as teaching or as service.

I submit that public pedagogy should be undertaken just as carefully as any academic teaching assignment.

3-"Pearls and Rubies to Their Discourse: Academic Rewards for American Scholars" - The Extracurricular Curriculum, published 1980 by the FPPH, Minneapolis, p. 100.

Recognition within the academy for nontraditional education will only be given if it is judged by rules of the academy. Research, planning, and evaluation are essential. You must know the program is needed and has a market, it must be well planned so as to warrant the participation of other academics, and then its impact must be assessed responsibly.

NJCH evaluates all of its projects on four levels: sponsor, NJCH staff, committee, and third-party evaluators. The third party evaluator is almost always an academic humanist. I regret to say that we do not yet do enough to share our evaluations with deans and division heads of the project director's institution when the program has been generated out of a community college. Our evaluation composite should be placed in an academic file.

You can find ways yourself to publicize your project and your effort. Good marketing and public relations techniques pay off for you as well as the project or activity.

In our effort to establish credibility and develop appropriate rewards we come perilously close to throwing away our nontraditional charm. In 1976 our program received a degree of institutionalization as it was written into the legislation that reauthorized the NEH - a basic minimum grant was established for each state. Fortunately a shopping list of new challenges comes with each reauthorization and we are put on our mettle to re-order our priorities, to set new formats and new policies, and to stress new combinations of humanities disciplines. Both of us - you in the humanist academy and we in public humanities must continue

to balance gracefully on the cutting edge of the sword of change, leaning neither too far towards comfortable tradition nor too far into unassessable experimentation. It is important to maintain an equipoise between solid tradition and excellent innovation.

But what of our basic product - the humanities? How can we preserve that marvelous approach to understanding the human spirit? The humanities cannot be learned in a weekend seminar packaged by hucksters. It takes total immersion over most of our lives, and we learn from scholars who have spent their lives studying, assessing, and reorganizing what we can know about the human condition. As we apply the humanities nontraditionally, we must also be sure that we continue in the humanist tradition to study, record, and preserve the best of what is written and spoken. I will end with another paradox -- perhaps it is through public pedagogy that we shall stimulate public support for academic pedagogy.

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